

“Permanent” Resolutions: Questions to Consider

There are only two truly permanent resolutions: return to parents and adoption. These resolutions are most possible when the following questions can be answered and the underlying issues they suggest have been dealt with.

Return to Parents	Adoption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have issues that brought the child into care been addressed by the agency? • Have the parents made the changes that the child protection agency requested? • Has the child protection agency caseworker observed and documented a reduction of risk? • What have the visits we observed told us about the parents' ability to care for the child? • Have we considered recommending a trial placement as a way to observe actual changes in childcare? • Have new issues that relate to risk been observed and addressed? • Has the child protection agency changed the rules or “raised the bar” in reference to expectations that are not related to risk? • Would the child protection agency remove this child today? • Is this a multiproblem family that is likely to relapse? • What services can be put in place to prevent relapse? • Have the legal and/or biological fathers been identified? • Have we recognized the child's grief and need to reconnect to the family of origin? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we ready to proceed with a termination of parental rights (TPR) case? • Do legal grounds exist? • Have we also considered the best interest issues that must be presented to the judge? • How long will the court process take? • Have the parents been asked to release the child for adoption? • Is the child already living with caretakers who are willing and able to adopt? • Are there relatives who are available to adopt? • How soon can the child be placed? • Who can help the child through the placement process? • Have we assessed and evaluated the child's particular needs and strengths? • What is the child's relationship with his/her siblings? • Should the child be placed with siblings? Can the child be placed with siblings? • Have we identified a placement option that will be able to meet the child's needs? • Have the child's ethnic and cultural needs been considered and addressed? • Are we holding up the child's placement waiting for a specific type of family? • Are the child's needs so severe that finding appropriate parents is unlikely? • Is the child able to accept “parenting”?

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Placement with Relative or Kin: Questions to Consider

Living with someone the child already knows and feels safe with can mitigate the child's feelings of loss, which are part of any placement. The use of a relative or kin placement should be evaluated from the beginning of agency involvement. The following questions should serve as guidance in considering both the pitfalls and benefits involved with kin and relative placements:

- Have the relatives/kin been carefully evaluated? Is there a written home study?
- What are the parents' thoughts and wishes in reference to this relative?
- What will be the ongoing relationship with the parents?
- Will the parents create problems with the placement or compromise the child's safety?
- Will the relative be able to protect the child from hostile or inappropriate parental behavior?
- Will the relative be able to be positive about the parent to the child?
- Will there be an "unofficial" return to the biological parents?
- Will this relative support the present service plan?
- If the plan changes, will the relative support the change?
- How will visitation be accomplished?
- Are the relatives able to understand and cooperate with agency expectations?
- Have the relatives of both parents been considered, regardless of the removal home?
- Is placement with relatives a way we can protect the child's roots in his/her community?
- Will placement with a particular relative mean that the child must leave the community?
- Will placement with a particular relative mean that the child will lose other important relative or kinship ties?
- Will a relative placement mean that the child will have to endure another move?
- What losses will the child experience if another move is required?
- Have we considered sibling attachments, as well as any "toxic" sibling issues?
- Is this potential caretaker related to all the siblings?
- Is this relative able and willing to take all the siblings?
- Will placement with the siblings be positive for this child?
- Will this placement support the child's ethnic and cultural identity?
- Is this seen as permanent by the potential caretakers?
- Would this relative consider adoption?
- Are there the same issues in the extended family that existed with the parents?
- What preplacement relationship existed?
- Does the child have any attachment to these relatives?
- Have the child's wishes been considered?

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Long-Term Foster Care—An Impermanent Solution: Questions to Consider

Despite the advocacy efforts of Child Advocacy volunteers and the hard work by caseworkers, many children remain in foster care and a family is not found for them. These children live in foster homes or group homes—or move from placement to placement during their time in care.

Long-term foster care becomes the plan for older or difficult children for whom there is no identified family. Sometimes these children are actually placed in a family setting but their caregivers do not want to adopt them. In any case, when the plan is permanent foster care, what the child protective services system is actually doing is planning for these children to belong to no one. Clearly this is unacceptable. When faced with this as the “only” alternative, it is our obligation to insist that this not be the end of the planning process, but rather the beginning of a new dialogue around how to make permanence a reality, even for the most difficult child. Begin this dialogue with these questions:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other options have been explored? • Does the child need specialized care? Is it possible for him/her to have a legal and emotional attachment with a person with whom he/she does not live? • Is there a significant role model or mentor involved with this child? What barriers exist to this person becoming the legal parent? • What are the barriers to the caregiver adopting? How can these barriers be removed? • Have all adoption subsidies, other financial resources, and continuing services been explored and offered? • Who have been the child's support and attachments in the past? Can any of them be involved now? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the child's attachments and support in the present? What is their current involvement? • What family or kin connections are available—especially with siblings? • Can parents or other kin be involved anew in this stage of the child's life? • What does the child want? • What resources and persons will be available when this child is an adult? • Who will be this child's family for the rest of his/her life? |
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PRINCIPLES OF PERMANENCE

There are many principles that you can follow as the child's advocate to ensure that the child in the system will not be forgotten. A number of these are listed below. Following them will ensure that your advocacy is focused on permanence for the child.

- **Constantly examine your own value system.**
Understand the difference between poor parenting and abuse and neglect. Make sure that you can accept a variety of parenting styles, even those that include behavior of which you do not approve.
- **Carefully examine the DHS case record.**
Understand the issues that brought the child into foster care. Ask agency staff about anything that does not make sense.
- **Ask the parents why they think they lost custody of their child.**
Do not assume that they understand or agree with the agency's reasons.
- **Recognize that the "system" should be operating on the child's sense of time.**
Help others to hear the clock that is ticking that childhood away.
- **Understand grief and the effects on children of moving and waiting.**
Keep permanent resolution as the focus of your efforts.
- **Stay child-centered and family-focused.**
Children need a permanent family—theirs, if possible—but not if it means the loss of their childhood.
- **Recognize parents' strengths, but do not ignore their failings.**
Advocate to return the child when the parents have "fixed" what brought their child into care. Advocate for termination of parental rights if the conditions persist.
- **Be a team player.**
Attend reviews, (if a CASA/GAL continue to investigate and assess), and share with the caseworker and the court what you learn.
- **Aggravate the system if you have to—be a catalyst for change.**
- **Work for justice—act with mercy.**

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PRINCIPLE OF "BEST INTEREST"

- **Recognize importance of advocating for a Safe home, a Stable home, as Soon as possible.**
Questions volunteers should ask themselves throughout a case: Is the child Safe? Is the child's unique culture being represented? What are the special needs for this child? Is the child's sense of time being honored? Is the child receiving the emotional nurturance necessary for healthy brain development? Can this child speak for him/herself? Should the child be present in court?